



# IMPACT OF INFLUENCER MARKETING ON THE PURCHASE INTENTION OF GEN Z CONSUMERS IN INDIA

Divyaditya Singh

## ABSTRACT

This study analyses the effectiveness of influencer marketing on the purchase intentions of Generation Z consumers in India. It focuses on trust and authenticity as key factors. Amid India’s rapid digitalization, influencer marketing has emerged as a reliable technique for engaging Generation Z, a technologically-savvy demographic that extensively utilizes social media. The study aims to investigate the impact of influencer marketing exposure, along with the roles of trust and authenticity, on the efficacy of marketing efforts in influencing purchasing behavior.

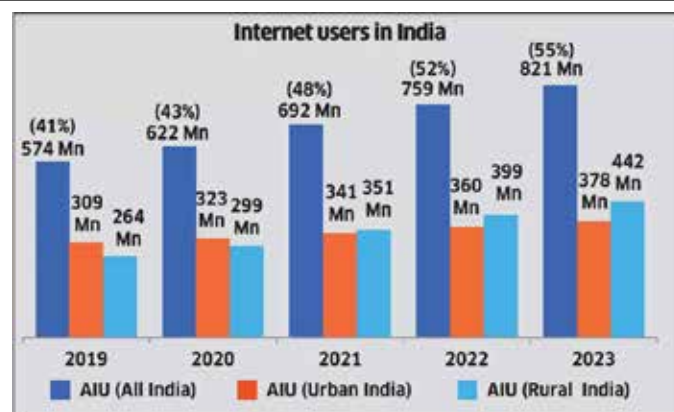
A quantitative methodology was employed, utilizing a survey to collect data from Indian Gen Z customers. Pearson’s correlation analysis was used to investigate the relationships among social media usage, trust, authenticity, and purchasing behavior. The findings indicate that although exposure to influencer content does not markedly increase purchases, trust exhibits a robust positive association with purchase frequency, whereas authenticity contributes to fostering trust and shaping consumer choices, although in a less direct manner.

The findings suggest that brands looking to engage Indian Gen Z consumers should prioritize trust-building through collaborations with credible influencers who maintain authenticity. Trust is the most significant driver of purchase intentions, with authenticity acting as a supporting factor in establishing this trust. These insights are valuable for marketers seeking to develop effective influencer marketing strategies that resonate with India’s diverse and digital-first Generation Z audience.

**KEYWORDS:** Influencer Marketing, Generation Z, Trust, Authenticity, Purchase Intentions, India

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The rapid proliferation of the internet has significantly reshaped the consumer landscape, particularly among Generation Z (Gen Z), considered “digital natives”. India, with over 918.19 million internet users as of 2024, is the second-largest online market in the world (Telecom Regulatory Authority of India, 2024); this number is projected to grow further at a quarterly rate of 2.5% (The Economic Times, 2024) (see Figure 1.1). Gen Z, comprising approximately 33% of India’s population, is increasingly becoming a critical consumer segment due to their high levels of social media engagement and digital literacy (World Bank, 2023). This demographic spends an average of 4.4 hours per day on social media platforms like Instagram, YouTube, and TikTok, making these platforms key areas for marketing and consumer influence (Kantar, 2021).



Source: The Economic Times (2024)

**Figure 1.1: Number of Active Internet Users in India**

Influencer marketing has emerged as a powerful tool for reaching Gen Z consumers, leveraging the credibility and relatability of influencers to shape purchasing behaviors. According to the India Brand Equity Foundation (2024), India’s influencer marketing industry will reach US\$ 404.82 million by 2026, with a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 18% from 2022 to 2026, largely driven by younger audiences (see Figure 1.2). However, while existing studies have explored the global impact of influencer marketing, particularly focusing on trust and authenticity (Lou & Yuan, 2019), there is limited research on how these factors operate in the diverse and highly localized Indian market.



Source: India Brand Equity Foundation (2024)

**Figure 1.2: Indian Influencer Marketing Size (US\$ million)**

In the Indian context, influencers hold considerable sway, especially among Gen Z, who emphasize trust and authenticity when making purchasing decisions (Priporas et al., 2017). According to Thangavel et al. (2021), around 90% of Indian consumers prefer influencer recommendations to traditional advertisements. Trust, as defined by the Source Credibility Theory, is the endorser's honesty, integrity, and believability (van der Walldt, 2011). Authenticity, often seen as a determinant of trust, plays a supporting role in strengthening consumer-influencer relationships (Audrezet et al., 2018). This study seeks to investigate how trust and authenticity influence the purchase intentions of Gen Z in India, where cultural diversity and unique social norms shape consumer behavior in distinct ways.

The scope of this study is limited to Indian Gen Z consumers, making the findings relevant to India's socio-economic and cultural environment. By narrowing the focus to this demographic, this study aims to provide actionable intelligence for marketers looking to engage with India's Gen Z effectively. Furthermore, by analyzing the relationships between influencer marketing, trust, authenticity, and purchase behavior, this research aims to fill the gap in localized studies on Indian Gen Z consumers and offer insights into optimizing influencer marketing strategies in India's dynamic digital landscape.

The research aims outlined below are designed to delve into the intricate dynamics of influencer marketing and its impact on the purchasing decisions of Generation Z consumers in India, focusing on key aspects such as authenticity and trust.

#### Research Aims:

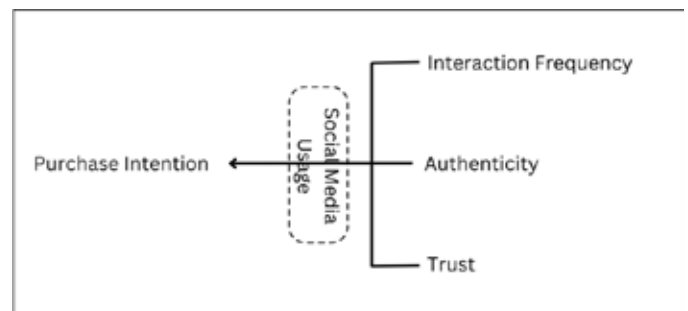
- To examine how influencer marketing shapes the purchase intentions of Generation Z consumers in India.
  - Focuses on understanding how exposure to influencers on social media impacts the purchase intentions of Gen Z consumers in India.
- To explore the role of authenticity and trust in shaping the effectiveness of influencer marketing among Generation Z consumers in India.
  - This aim seeks to determine the factors that make influencer marketing particularly effective or ineffective with this demographic.

#### Research Questions:

Research Question	Aspect of Influencer Marketing	Focus
RQ1: Does exposure to influencer marketing on social media platforms affect the purchase intentions of Generation Z consumers in India?	Exposure to Influencer Marketing	Purchase Intentions
RQ2: Is trust a key factor that influences the effectiveness of influencer marketing on Generation Z in India?	Trust	Effectiveness
RQ3: Is authenticity a key factor that influences the effectiveness of influencer marketing on Generation Z in India?	Authenticity	Effectiveness
RQ4: Is authenticity or trust the most important key factor that influences the effectiveness of influencer marketing on Generation Z in India?	Authenticity vs. Trust	Key Factors of Effectiveness

#### Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework developed for this study (Figure 1.3) examines the relationship between key variables influencing the purchase intentions of Gen Zs in India. The dependent variable (DV) is *Purchase Intention*, while the independent variables (IVs) include *Trust* in Influencers, *Authenticity* of Influencers, and *Exposure to Influencer Marketing (Interaction Frequency)*. A potential moderating variable may impact the strength of the relationships between the IVs and the DV – *Social Media Usage* (Frequency).



**Figure 1.3: Proposed Conceptual Framework**

#### Summary

This study explores the impact of influencer marketing on the purchase intentions of India's Generation Z. With 918.19 million internet users and rising social media engagement, influencers play a pivotal role in shaping Gen Z's consumer behavior. The research examines trust and authenticity as critical factors influencing purchasing decisions. This study aims to provide actionable insights for marketers targeting India's culturally and socioeconomically diverse market by addressing a gap in localized studies.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

### Introduction

The rise of digital platforms has revolutionized the way consumers interact with brands, and this shift is most pronounced among Generation Z, a demographic born in the digital age. As marketers navigate this transformation, influencer marketing has emerged as a leading strategy, leveraging the credibility of individuals who resonate with this audience. Existing literature has focused on trust and authenticity as pivotal components of influencer marketing, significantly shaping consumer behavior (Lou & Yuan, 2019; Djafarova & Rushworth, 2017). However, there is a notable gap in understanding how these factors operate within diverse markets like India, where cultural nuances influence consumer decision-making. This literature review synthesizes key findings on Gen Z's media habits, the evolution of influencer marketing, and the role of trust and authenticity in driving purchase intentions, particularly within the Indian context. This comprehensive review will highlight theoretical frameworks, emerging trends, and the gaps that call for further exploration in localized studies.

### Understanding Generation Z as Consumers

Generation Z (Gen Z), born between the mid-1990s and early 2010s, is often referred to as digital natives due to their inherent familiarity with technology and the internet. This cohort values authenticity, transparency, and personalized brand interactions, making them distinct from previous generations (Priporas et al., 2017). Gen Z highlights their values of being socially conscious by preferring to engage with brands that reflect their values of sustainability, diversity, and social responsibility (Salam et al., 2024).

In terms of media consumption habits, Gen Z spends an average of 4 to 5 hours daily on social media platforms like Instagram, YouTube, and TikTok, where influencers play a significant role in shaping their purchasing decisions (Kantar, 2021). Unlike traditional advertising, which they often disregard, Gen Z prefers content that feels authentic and relatable.

Influencer marketing has emerged as an essential strategy for brands aiming to reach this demographic, with 44% of Gen Z claiming that their purchase decisions are substantially impacted by influencers (Salam et al., 2024). Influencers offer the authenticity that Gen Z craves, creating a connection that drives purchase behavior in a way that resonates with their media habits and preferences.

### Influencer Marketing: Concepts and Strategies

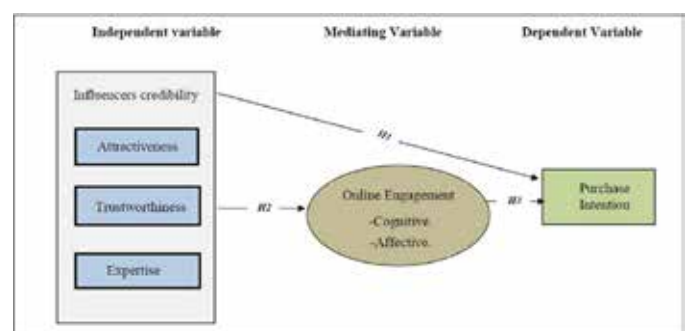
Byrne et al. (2017, as cited in Nguyen et al., 2022: 812) defined influencer marketing as “a type of marketing that focuses on using key leaders to drive a brand’s message to the larger market.” Influencers are similar to opinion leaders with “a solid personal brand” who can impact individuals in the specific community and industry and encourage them to try a brand’s products and services according to their recommendations and advice (Li & Du, 2011; Brown & Fiorella, 2013). Interestingly, 92% of consumers worldwide trust an individual’s recommendation rather than conventional advertising (Nielsen, 2015, as cited in Nguyen et al., 2022: 811); these influencers are seen as trusted

voices within their communities, and their endorsements often carry more weight than traditional advertising (Lou & Yuan, 2019). This phenomenon is the bedrock upon which the concept of influencer marketing is built. The evolution of influencer marketing is closely tied to the growth of social media platforms like Instagram, YouTube, and TikTok, where influencers produce engaging content that aligns with their followers’ preferences.

There are various types of influencers, generally categorized based on their follower count and influence. Celebrity influencers are typically celebrities with over a million followers, commanding vast reach but often less personal engagement (Djafarova & Rushworth, 2017). Macro-influencers have between 100,000 to 1 million followers, offering broad influence while maintaining a degree of relatability. Micro-influencers, with followers ranging from 10,000 to 100,000, are known for their niche expertise and highly engaged audiences (Abidin, 2016). Lastly, micro-influencers, with fewer than 10,000 followers, may have the smallest reach but are highly trusted by their followers due to their authentic and close-knit community relationships (de Veirman et al., 2017). Each type of influencer serves a unique strategic purpose, allowing brands to tailor their marketing efforts based on campaign goals and target demographics.

### Theoretical Frameworks in Influencer Marketing

Several theoretical frameworks underpin the study of influencer marketing, with the Source Credibility Theory being a key concept (see Figure 2.1 below). This theory posits that “people or receivers are more likely to be persuaded when the source presents itself as credible” (van der Waltdt, 2011; Umeogu, 2012: 112). In the context of influencer marketing, “three main aspects of influencers’ credibility: attractiveness, trustworthiness, and expertise are key factors predicting online customers’ engagement directly” (AlFarraj et al., 2021).



Source: AlFarraj et al. (2021)

**Figure 2.1: Source Credibility Theory**

The Social Influence Theory suggests that individuals’ behaviors are influenced by the opinions and actions of others, particularly those within their social networks (Cialdini & Goldstein, 2004). Influencers, by virtue of their perceived authority and relatability, exert significant social influence over their followers, making this theory relevant to understanding how influencers guide purchasing decisions.

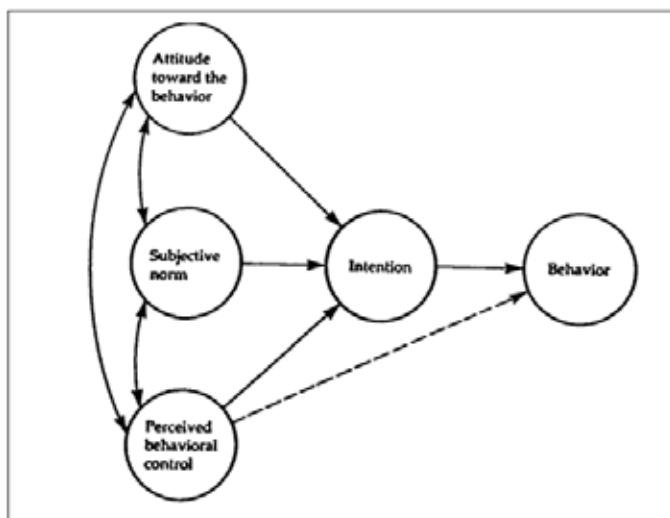
Lastly, within the digital marketing landscape, consumer

decision-making models like the AIDA (Attention, Interest, Desire, Action) give a structured understanding of how consumers make purchasing decisions (Purbaningsih, 2022) (Figure 2.2). Similarly, according to the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB), purchase intentions are influenced by attitudes toward the behavior, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control (Figure 2.3 below) (Ajzen, 1991).



Source: Chakrabarty (2023)

Figure 2.2: AIDA Model



Source: Ajzen (1991)

Figure 2.3: Theory of Planned Behavior

These models are essential for understanding how influencers can influence their followers' purchase intentions and strategically guide them through the decision-making process.

### Trust and Authenticity in Influencer Marketing

Trust plays a pivotal role in influencer marketing, as consumers are likelier to engage with and act on the recommendations of influencers they perceive as trustworthy. Research by Lou & Yuan (2019) suggests that trust, built through consistent, authentic, and transparent communication, enhances engagement and increases the likelihood of followers making purchase decisions based on influencer recommendations. In this context, trust enables influencers to create a bond with their audience, influencing followers' purchasing decisions (Lou & Yuan, 2019).

Closely linked to trust is authenticity, which refers to the perceived genuineness of an influencer, and is a key determinant of an influencer's effectiveness in marketing (Priporas et al., 2017; Salam et al., 2024). Influencers who are seen as authentic tend to foster deeper connections with their followers, as authenticity enhances credibility and relatability (Audrezet et al., 2018). Authenticity drives consumer trust, boosting the effectiveness of influencer marketing campaigns.

However, maintaining authenticity presents challenges. As influencers increasingly collaborate with brands, there is a risk of losing their perceived authenticity, leading to skepticism among followers (Campbell & Farrell, 2020). The delicate balance between promoting products and retaining a genuine persona is crucial to sustaining the trust necessary for influencer marketing to succeed.

### The Impact of Influencer Marketing on Purchase Intentions

Purchase intention refers to a consumer's likelihood or willingness to buy a product or service based on their interactions and perceptions (Al Farraj et al., 2021). Researchers found that it has a major impact on purchase intentions by utilizing the credibility and trust that influencers have with their target audiences (Tafesse & Wood, 2021). According to a study by Schivinski & Dabrowski (2016), purchase intention is often influenced by factors such as perceived authenticity, the relevance of the product to the consumer, and the emotional bond cultivated via influencer content. Therefore, influencers play an increasingly significant role in influencing consumers' purchase intentions in the context of digital marketing when consumers are flooded with information (Muniyandi et al., 2024). Their ability to provide personalized and relatable endorsements can impactfully guide consumers from awareness to the final decision-making stage, making purchase intention a notable outcome of successful influencer campaigns.

The factors influencing purchase intentions in influencer marketing include (i) the perceived authenticity of the influencer, (ii) their perceived trustworthiness, and (iii) the frequency of interaction with their content (Lou & Yuan, 2019; Audrezet et al., 2020; Casalo et al., 2020; Tafesse & Wood, 2021; Nguyen et al., 2022). These factors are essential to the success of influencer marketing initiatives since they together affect the decision-making process.

Through regular engagement, influencers can shape not only brand awareness but also consumer perceptions, directly influencing purchase intentions. The authenticity and trust cultivated by influencers are thus essential to converting social media engagement into concrete purchasing actions. This highlights influencers' critical role in shaping the modern consumer decision-making process.

### Influencer Marketing in the Indian Context

India's digital landscape has witnessed exponential growth, with over 918.19 million internet users, making it one of the largest online markets in the world (Telecom Regulatory Authority of India, 2024). The rapid adoption of smartphones and affordable data plans has resulted in a surge of social



media usage, particularly among Generation Z. Platforms like Instagram, YouTube, and TikTok are immensely popular, creating fertile ground for influencer marketing to thrive.

Culturally, influencer marketing in India is shaped by the country's diversity in language, traditions, and social values. Indian consumers tend to place high importance on community and family opinions, which translates into their trust in influencers who reflect their cultural identity and share relatable values (Nayeem, 2012). Influencers who connect with local audiences by incorporating regional languages, customs, and narratives into their content often find greater success in driving consumer engagement (Casalo et al., 2020).

### Gaps in the Literature and Future Research Directions

Despite the growing body of literature on influencer marketing, several gaps remain, particularly concerning the Indian context. Much of the existing research focuses on Western markets, leaving a gap in understanding how cultural nuances and regional diversity in India affect the effectiveness of influencer marketing strategies (Lou & Yuan, 2019). Additionally, there is limited research on how trust and authenticity interact with other factors, such as consumer loyalty and long-term brand relationships in influencer marketing.

Future research should investigate how regional influencers—those catering to specific linguistic or cultural communities in India—impact consumer behavior. Exploring how different types of influencers (e.g., micro vs. macro) influence purchasing decisions across varied socio-economic groups within India could offer more localized insights. Moreover, studies should consider the long-term effects of influencer marketing, including its impact on brand loyalty and repeat purchases, as most research currently focuses on immediate consumer responses. Schivinski & Dabrowski (2016) study short-term purchase intentions, but longitudinal research is needed to evaluate whether influencer-driven engagement leads to Gen Z brand loyalty.

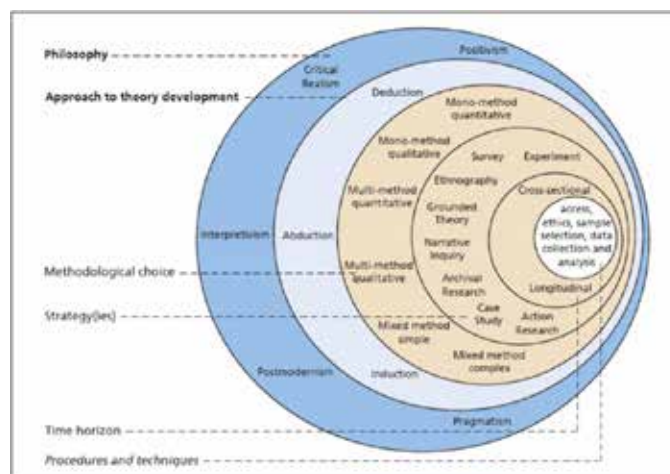
Research could also examine the ethical considerations in influencer marketing, particularly in maintaining transparency and managing consumer perceptions of authenticity amid increasing commercial partnerships. These areas would provide valuable insights into creating more nuanced, culturally relevant, and ethically sound influencer marketing strategies in India.

## 3. METHODOLOGY

### Introduction

This study employs a quantitative research approach to explore the impact of influencer marketing on the purchase intentions of Generation Z consumers in India. The methodology was structured using the 'Saunders Research Onion', which effectively organizes the research process (see Figure 3.1). Each methodology section progresses with each 'layer' of the onion. This systematic approach promises transparency regarding data access, sample selection, and the methods of data collection and analysis employed. The methodology starts with the research philosophy, followed by the research approach and

design, and finally culminates in data collection and analysis. The study employs a rigorous and transparent research model, directing each phase of the investigation into the effects of trust and authenticity on the purchase intentions of Indian Gen Z consumers.



Source: Saunders et al. (2023)

Figure 3.1: The 'Research Onion'

### Research Philosophy, Approach, and Method

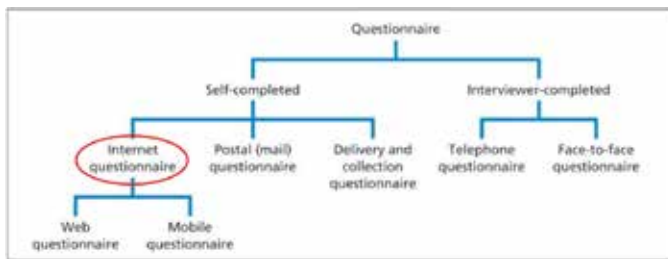
This study adopts a positivist research philosophy, focusing on objective reality and measurable phenomena (Saunders et al., 2019). A deductive approach is utilized, deriving hypotheses from existing theories related to influencer marketing and testing them through empirical observation. This study uses a *mono-method quantitative* study, which employs a single data collection technique (survey questionnaire) and a corresponding data analysis procedure (Pearson's correlation coefficient) to examine the relationships between variables such as trust, authenticity, and purchase intentions collected in a standard manner, numerically measured, and analyzed using statistical techniques. This approach aligns with the extensive digital landscape in India, where high internet penetration and social media usage among Gen Z provide a robust context for quantitative analysis (Statista, 2020). The methodology facilitates a systematic examination of how influencer marketing impacts consumer behavior within this demographic.

Positivist refers to the importance of what is 'posited', i.e., 'given'.

### Research Strategy Process & Time Horizon

This study adopts a survey-based research strategy, utilizing structured internet questionnaires to collect quantitative data from a target population of Generation Z consumers in India aged 18 to 29 (see Figure 3.2). It is one of the most widely used data collection methods, and has various benefits; for example, a large, geographically dispersed sample size could be targeted, with its completion requiring no oversight, and the financial costs associated with the data collection being bare minimum since no financial incentive was offered to respondents. A drawback of this method is that the researcher is unlikely to have more than one opportunity to collect the data, especially from those individuals who have already completed

one questionnaire by the said researcher (Saunders, 2015: 439).



Source: Saunders (2015, p440)

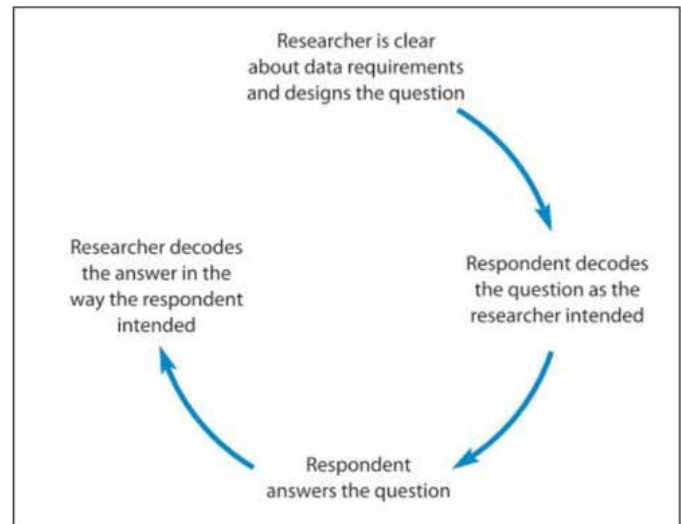
**Figure 3.2: Types of questionnaires; choice for this research circled in red**

The following inclusion criteria were followed:

- Participants must be aged 18-29, fitting the Gen Z demographic.
- Participants must be Indian residents or Indian nationals living abroad temporarily.
- Participants must have used social media within the past year.

The population was selected due to their high engagement with social media and influencers, making them a relevant demographic for the study. However, it should be noted that enforcing inclusion criteria 3 was not feasible, as it relied solely on the participants' self-reporting of their social media usage within the past year, introducing a potential source of response bias.

This is a cross-sectional study, i.e., it involves observing particular phenomena at a particular time (Saunders et al., 2023). Data collection took place over 2 weeks and would take a respondent, on average, less than 5 minutes to complete. Optimum visual presentation was ensured by including an unbiased title, an explanatory subtitle, a neutral stock image, and appropriate formatting. The survey was distributed via WhatsApp, and to ensure diverse and organic responses, participants were encouraged to share it within their networks. The stages in a reliable questionnaire process, as provided by Foddy (1994), were effectively followed (see Figure 3.3). The questionnaire collected three types of data as categorized by Dillman et al. (2014): (i) demographic, (ii) attitudes and opinions, and (iii) behaviors and events. Except for three secondary questions, all questions were forced-choice questions, i.e., the respondents were provided with several alternate answers to choose from (De Vaus, 2014); this was done to avoid collecting subjective answers that could not be numerically analyzed.



Source: Foddy (1994, reproduced in Saunders, 2015)

**Figure 3.3: Stages in a valid and reliable questionnaire process**

Lastly, as recommended by Saunders (2015), pilot testing was conducted on five Gen Z individuals to test for design, clarity, presentation, explanation of purpose, and careful planning and execution before sending the self-completed internet questionnaire out. A questionnaire was chosen based on the confidence that the standardised questions would be interpreted by all respondents in the same way (Robson, 2011, as cited in Saunders, 2015: 439).

### Research Design & Data Analysis

The research design is correlational i.e., it aims to explore the relationships between various variables, and was chosen to determine and quantify the strength of relationships between key variables related to influencer marketing and consumer behavior. When the goal is to ascertain the degree of the relationship between variables, rather than to establish causation, this design is deemed appropriate.

The data collected was analyzed using *Pearson's correlation coefficient* to examine the relationships between the key variables: trust, authenticity, interaction frequency, and purchase intention, and to measure the strength and direction of relationships between the independent variables (trust, authenticity, and interaction frequency) and the dependent variable (purchase intention). If both variables contain numerical data, a researcher should use Pearson's Correlation Coefficient to assess the linear strength of the relationship (Saunders et al., 2023; Samuels & Gilchrist, 2014). Thus, this method was ideal for this study as it helped quantify the extent to which these variables influenced consumer behavior.

The data was first exported from Google Forms into Microsoft Excel for cleaning and organizing. Following this, the correlation analysis was conducted using Microsoft Excel to ensure accuracy and precision in statistical calculations. The results were interpreted based on the correlation values (r), with positive or negative relationships identified between variables, along with the significance levels (p-values) to assess the validity

of the findings. The analysis allowed a better understanding of which factors—trust or authenticity—had a stronger influence on purchase intentions. The findings from the data analysis were then used to answer the research questions and provide insights into the effectiveness of influencer marketing among Generation Z consumers in India.

### Ethical Considerations

This study adhered to strict ethical guidelines, ensuring participants' confidentiality and anonymity were protected. All participants provided informed consent before participation, and no personal identifying information was collected. Ethical approval was obtained in line with institutional standards (Saunders et al., 2019).

### Summary

Guided by Saunders' 'Research Onion', this study employed a quantitative research approach to examine the impact of influencer marketing on Gen Z consumers in India. The research design involved a cross-sectional survey distributed via social media, targeting a population of Gen Z respondents aged 18-29. The data was collected using a structured Google Forms questionnaire which recorded variables such as social media usage, interaction with influencer content, trust, and purchase behavior. Pearson's correlation coefficient was used to analyse the relationships between key variables, measuring the strength and direction of their influence on consumers' purchase intentions. Strict ethical considerations were followed, ensuring the confidentiality and voluntary participation of respondents. Lastly, the findings provided valuable insights into the relative importance of trust and authenticity in driving purchase decisions.

## 4. RESULTS

### Introduction and Demographic Overview

The Results section presents the findings from the quantitative analysis conducted to address the research questions. It analyzes the relationships between key variables such as social media usage, interaction frequency with influencer content, trust in influencers, and purchase frequency. The study uses Pearson correlation tests to examine the strength and direction of these relationships, providing insights into how these factors impact Gen Z consumer behavior. These correlations are vital for understanding the effectiveness of influencer marketing, especially when determining how trust and perceived authenticity shape purchase decisions within this demographic. The findings presented here will be directly aligned with the research aims and questions, setting the stage for a deeper discussion and interpretation in the subsequent sections of the dissertation.

Glossary	
SMU	Social Media Usage
IF	Interaction Frequency
PF	Purchase Frequency
TF	Trust Factor
AI	Authenticity Importance

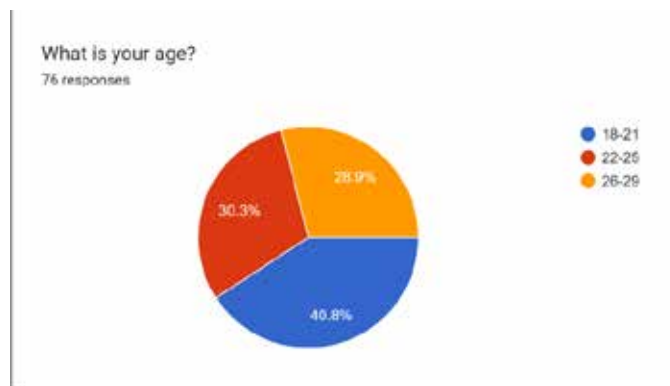


Figure 4.1: Age Distribution of the Respondents

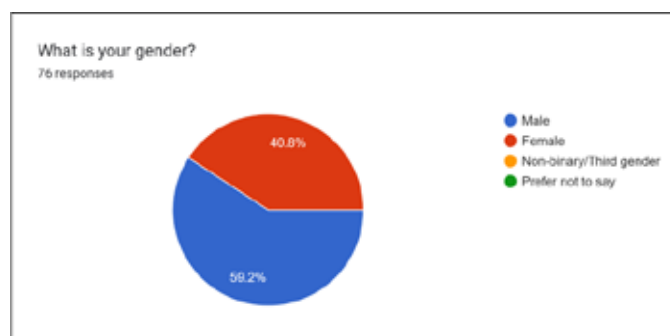


Figure 4.2: Gender Distribution of the Respondents

A total of 76 respondents within the age range of 18 to 29 years were surveyed (see Figure 4.1), aligning with the typical age bracket for Gen Z, who are recognized as individuals born between the mid-1990s and early 2010s (Salam et al., 2024). It can be observed that the gender distribution was balanced, with a slight majority of respondents identifying as male (Figure 4.2).

This demographic composition is coherent with the characteristics of India's Gen Z, who are highly engaged with social media and digital content (Priporas et al., 2017). By ensuring that the sample is representative of the broader Gen Z population, the study improves the reliability of its findings. This supports the generalisability of the results, enabling meaningful insights into how influencer marketing impacts purchase intentions among this key demographic segment.

### Social Media Usage and Interaction with Influencer Content

**Research Question 1: "Does exposure to influencer marketing on social media platforms affect the purchase intentions of Generation Z consumers in India?"**

To address Research Question 1, the relationship between **Social Media Usage (SMU)** and **Interaction Frequency (IF)** with influencer content was analyzed using the Pearson correlation test. The analysis sought to determine whether the amount of time spent on social media correlates with how often Gen Z consumers engage with content posted by influencers.

The Pearson correlation coefficient ( $r$ ) between Social Media Usage and Interaction Frequency was found to be **0.176**, indicating a *very weak positive correlation*. This suggests that while there is some association between the time spent



on social media (Figure 4.3) and the frequency of interaction with influencer content (Figure 4.4), it is not strong. This weak correlation may reflect this demographic's diverse nature of social media consumption practices, where users might be spending significant time on platforms for reasons other than engaging with influencers, such as entertainment, communication, or content creation (Dixon, 2024). This insight lays the foundation for further analyses in subsequent sections of factors, such as trust and authenticity, that might influence purchase intentions more directly.

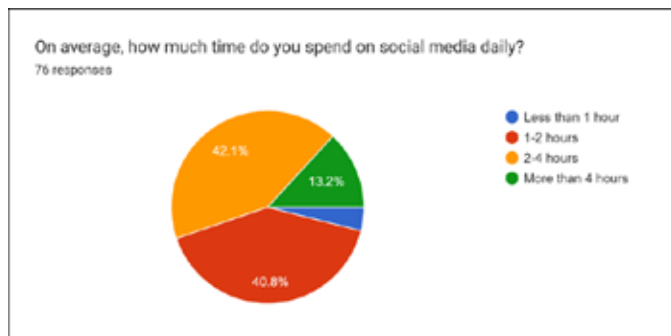


Figure 4.3: Respondents' Daily Social Media Usage (SMU)

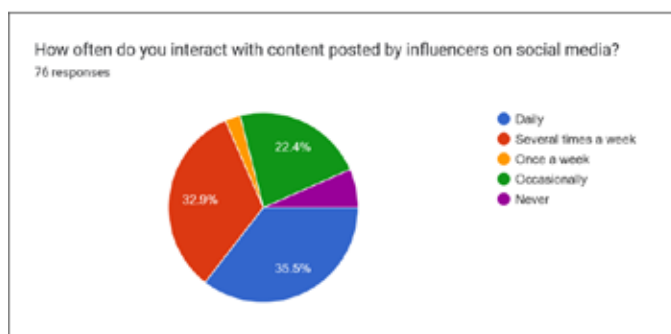


Figure 4.4: Respondents' Daily Interaction Frequency (IF)

#### Interaction Frequency and Purchase Behavior

**Research Question 1: "Does exposure to influencer marketing on social media platforms affect the purchase intentions of Generation Z consumers in India?"**

Continuing the exploration of Research Question 1, this section examines the relationship between **Interaction Frequency (IF)** with influencer content and **Purchase Frequency (PF)** among Indian Generation Z consumers. The correlation test yielded a Pearson coefficient ( $r$ ) of **0.016**, indicating an *extremely weak positive correlation* between Interaction Frequency (Figure 4.4) and Purchase Frequency (Figure 4.5). This result suggests that there is virtually *no direct relationship* between the frequency with which Gen Z consumers engage with influencer content and their likelihood of purchasing products recommended by influencers. In practical terms, this finding implies that simply interacting more frequently with influencer content does not significantly influence Gen Z consumers' purchasing decisions. This underscores the need to consider additional factors in understanding the full impact of influencer marketing on consumer behavior.



Figure 4.5: Respondents' Purchase Frequency (PF)

#### Trust in Influencers and Purchase Frequency

**Research Question 2: "Is trust a key factor that influences the effectiveness of influencer marketing on Generation Z in India?"**

Upon examining the relationship between **Trust in Influencers (Trust Factor, TF)** and **Purchase Frequency (PF)**, the test revealed a Pearson correlation coefficient ( $r$ ) of **0.599**, indicating a *strong positive correlation* between Trust Factor and Purchase Frequency.

This result suggests that higher levels of trust in influencers are significantly associated with more frequent purchases of products they recommend.

This emphasizes trust as a crucial influencer marketing factor. When followers trust influencers, they are more likely to buy the products or services they promote (AlFarraj et al., 2021). This supports research that highlights trust as a key to effective influencer marketing, especially among younger, more skeptical consumers like Gen Z (Van der Walde et al., 2009; Umeogu, 2012; AlFarraj et al., 2021).

Figure 4.6 visually represents the varying levels of trust. Overall, the data suggests that trust is not merely a contributing factor but a crucial element that significantly enhances the effectiveness of influencer marketing.

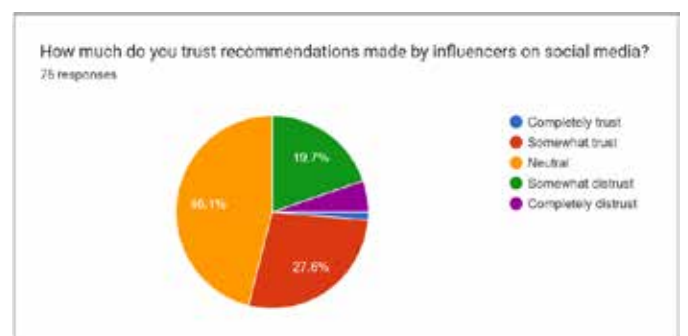


Figure 4.6: Respondents' Trust Factor in Recommendations Made by Influencers

#### Authenticity and Its Role in Influencer Marketing

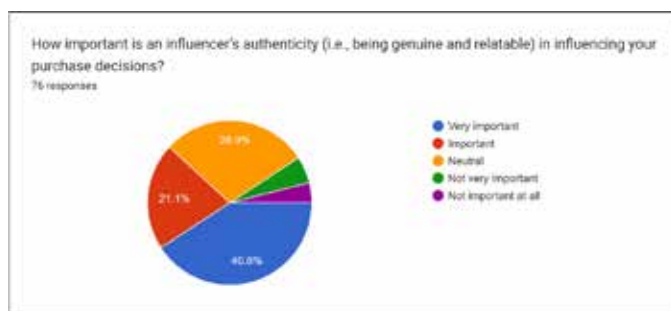
**Research Question 3: "Is authenticity a key factor that influences the effectiveness of influencer marketing on Generation Z in India?"**

Examining the relationship between **Authenticity Importance (AI)** and **Purchase Frequency (PF)** produced a coefficient ( $r$ ) of **0.286**, indicating a *moderate positive correlation* between



the perceived importance of an influencer's authenticity (Figure 4.7) and the frequency with which consumers make purchases based on their recommendations (Figure 4.5). This suggests that while authenticity plays a significant role in influencing purchase decisions, its impact is less direct compared to trust. Findings indicate that authenticity is a key, although not the sole, factor in Gen Z influencer marketing in India.

In essence, Gen Z consumers are more likely to purchase products endorsed by influencers whom they perceive as genuine and relatable. However, this is just one of several factors that influence their final decision.



**Figure 4.7: Authenticity Importance (AI) in Influencing Purchase Decisions**

### Summary of Key Findings

The correlation between Social Media Usage (SMU) and Interaction Frequency (IF) was found to be very weak ( $r = 0.176$ ), indicating that the amount of time spent on social media does not strongly predict engagement with influencer content. Similarly, the relationship between Interaction Frequency (IF) and Purchase Frequency (PF) was negligible ( $r = 0.016$ ), suggesting that mere interaction with influencer content does not directly lead to purchases.

In contrast, the study uncovered a strong positive correlation between Trust Factor (TF) and Purchase Frequency (PF) ( $r = 0.599$ ), highlighting trust as a critical determinant of purchase behavior. Additionally, the moderate correlation between Authenticity Importance (AI) and Purchase Frequency (PF) ( $r = 0.286$ ) underscores the role of authenticity in enhancing the effectiveness of influencer marketing, although it is not as influential as trust.

## 5. DISCUSSION

### Introduction

The following discussion will examine the effects of trust and authenticity in influencer marketing, compare the findings to established theories such as the Source Credibility Theory, and assess the implications for Gen Z marketing in India. The section concludes by addressing the limitations of the study and suggesting avenues for future research.

### Interpretation of Findings Related to Research Question 1

**Research Question 1: "Does exposure to influencer marketing on social media platforms affect the purchase intentions of Generation Z consumers in India?"**

The *very weak correlation* between Interaction Frequency (IF) and Purchase Frequency (PF) indicates that mere interaction with influencer content is *not* a significant predictor of purchase behavior. This aligns with the literature, which suggests that interaction alone does not drive consumer actions but rather serves as a preliminary step that requires reinforcement through other factors such as trust and authenticity (Van der Walddt et al., 2009; AlFarraj et al., 2021; Tafesse & Wood, 2021).

Thus, we can answer RQ1 by stating that exposure to influencer marketing on social media platforms does **not** significantly affect the purchase intentions of Generation Z consumers in India.

These findings support the Source Credibility Theory, which states that message effectiveness depends more on source trustworthiness than message frequency (van der Walddt et al., 2009). Thus, despite consistent exposure to influencers, the lack of credibility or trustworthiness reduces their capacity to influence purchasing decisions.

These findings suggest marketers should boost social media exposure and engagement quality. Due to the weak association, increasing influencer postings or interactions are unlikely to increase purchase intentions. Instead, marketers should develop trust and credibility through original content and meaningful connections. To conclude, Gen Z is engaged on social media, but the quality and authenticity of their connections are more crucial in determining their purchasing intentions.

### Interpretation of Findings Related to Research Question 2

**Research Question 2: "Is trust a key factor that influences the effectiveness of influencer marketing on Generation Z in India?"**

The *strong positive correlation* ( $r = 0.599$ ) between Trust Factor (TF) and Purchase Frequency (PF) indicates that trust in influencers is a significant predictor of purchase behavior among Generation Z consumers in India, underscoring the pivotal role of trust in the effectiveness of influencer marketing as it directly influences the likelihood of consumers acting on the recommendations made by influencers (Salam et al., 2024). This further aligns with the Source Credibility Theory, which suggests that trustworthiness is a critical component of an influencer's credibility and, by extension, their persuasive power (van der Walddt et al., 2009; Lou & Yuan, 2019).

Thus, it can be interpreted that Gen Z customers are more likely to buy based on influencer endorsements when they trust them. This suggests that influencers must be genuine, transparent, and consistent on screen to build and maintain audience trust (Nguyen et al., 2022). It also advises businesses to partner with credible influencers who are trusted by their followers.

Thus, we can confidently answer RQ2 by stating that of all the factors observed, **trust is the most important factor** that influences the effectiveness of influencer marketing on Generation Z in India. To maximize the effectiveness of their influencer marketing campaigns, brands should collaborate

with influencers who have established high levels of trust with their followers, ensuring that their endorsements are viewed as reliable and authentic.

### Interpretation of Findings Related to Research Question 3

#### **Research Question 3: “Is authenticity a key factor that influences the effectiveness of influencer marketing on Generation Z in India?”**

The *moderate positive correlation* ( $r = 0.286$ ) between Authenticity Importance (AI) and Purchase Frequency (PF) indicates that while authenticity is important, it plays a less direct role in influencing purchase decisions compared to trust. This finding is consistent with existing literature, which positions authenticity as a key factor in establishing trust, but not necessarily as a standalone driver of purchase behavior (Audrezet et al., 2020). The moderate correlation suggests that while Generation Z values influencers who appear genuine and relatable (Salam et al., 2024), it is trust that plays a more decisive role in driving their purchase decisions.

Audrezet et al. (2020) and Nguyen et al. (2022) found that authenticity strengthens influencer-audience relationships, but it must be paired with other factors like credibility and expertise to influence consumer behavior. According to the Social Influence Theory, authenticity boosts the influencer’s credibility, but trust drives effective purchasing intentions.

Thus, we can answer RQ3 by stating that **yes**, authenticity is a **key factor** that bolsters the perceived trustworthiness of influencers, but it is not the primary driver of purchase behavior among Gen Z consumers in India. Instead, authenticity and trust must work in conjunction to effectively influence purchase decisions. Marketers should emphasize authenticity in influencer content, but authenticity alone is not enough without trust-based audience relationships.

### Interpretation of Findings Related to Research Question 4

#### **Research Question 4: “Is authenticity or trust the most important key factor that influences the effectiveness of influencer marketing on Generation Z in India?”**

This study statistically demonstrates that trust is a more significant factor than authenticity in influencing the effectiveness of influencer marketing, as shown by the *stronger positive correlation* between trust and purchase frequency ( $r = 0.599$ ) compared to the *moderate correlation* between authenticity and purchase frequency ( $r = 0.286$ ). This finding aligns with the Source Credibility Theory, which underscores trustworthiness as a key component in assessing the effectiveness of a compelling message (van der Waldt et al., 2009). This is also consistent with studies by Lou & Yuan (2019) and Audrezet et al. (2020), who suggest that while authenticity reinforces an influencer’s perceived credibility, the trust established with the audience eventually drives consumer action.

Therefore, the statistical evidence in this study supports the conclusion that trust is the most important factor in the effectiveness of influencer marketing for Gen Z in India, with authenticity serving as a facilitator rather than the principal driver.

These findings have major implications for Indian Gen Z brands and marketers considering the intricate relationship between trust and authenticity. Authenticity builds trust, but trust drives purchase decisions. This nuance implies that authenticity is required but not sufficient to motivate consumer action; it must be backed by other factors, like influencer expertise and reliability. For influencer marketing to be effective, influencers must be genuine and trusted by their audience.

### Comparison with the Literature

The findings align with the existing literature, particularly regarding the importance of trust and authenticity in influencer marketing. Consistent with Lou & Yuan (2019), trust was found to be the most significant predictor of purchase behavior. Additionally, the findings echo Djafarova & Rushworth (2017), who emphasized that Generation Z consumers are selective about their purchases, requiring influencers to be credible and trustworthy. The role of authenticity as a supporting factor, enhancing trust but not directly driving purchases, corroborates research by Audrezet et al. (2018). Overall, this research reinforces the critical roles of trust and authenticity in shaping consumer decisions, while also addressing the gap in localized studies on Indian Gen Z consumers.

### Practical Implications for Marketers

This study found that trust is strongly correlated to purchase frequency, and thus brands must prioritize trust in influencer relationships. To achieve this, marketers should work with audience-trustworthy influencers. According to the Source Credibility Theory, brands should choose influencers with a track record of genuine and transparent communication (van der Waldt et al., 2009).

Although less direct than trust, authenticity is still moderately important in influencer efforts. Brands must ensure that influencers share their values and promote their products. According to Audrezet et al. (2020), coherence boosts the influencer’s reputation and increases the likelihood of influencing purchases.

To attract Gen Z customers in the Indian digital space, brands must create compelling, authentic, and trustworthy content. Customised content for Indian Gen Z’s cultural and regional preferences can boost influencer marketing. These insights can help organizations build closer relationships with their target audience, increasing engagement and conversion rates in a competitive market.

### Limitations of the Study

This study experienced certain limitations. Although sufficient for exploratory analysis, the sample size of 76 respondents may limit the generalisability of the findings to Indian Gen Z. Self-reported data from an online survey may have caused response biases in the study; participants may have overstated their social media usage, engagement frequency, or influencer trust, thereby inflating results. Focusing on Gen Z in India and using quantitative methodologies limit the study’s scope. The findings are relevant but may not apply to different age groups or cultures. Lastly, the study did not examine influencer

marketing's long-term effects on customer behavior or brand loyalty.

## 6. CONCLUSION AND FUTURE RESEARCH

### DIRECTIONS

This study explores the impact of influencer marketing on Generation Z consumers in India, particularly focusing on trust and authenticity. The findings emphasize that while mere exposure to and interaction with influencer content on social media does not significantly drive purchase intentions, trust plays a pivotal role in influencing buying behavior. Authenticity supports trust-building but is not a standalone factor for purchasing decisions. The data underscores the importance of engaging credible influencers who maintain genuine connections with their followers to maximize marketing effectiveness.

Marketers should prioritize trust-driven strategies, leveraging influencers known for transparency and reliability. While authenticity remains important, it should complement efforts to establish trust. This approach can lead to meaningful engagement with Generation Z, a demographic increasingly valuing ethical and transparent practices in digital marketing.

Future research could further investigate long-term influencer marketing impacts, such as brand loyalty, and explore regional or cross-cultural variations within Gen Z's purchasing behavior. Addressing these gaps can provide marketers with nuanced strategies tailored to India's diverse digital landscape, ensuring more impactful influencer marketing campaigns.

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